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ABSTRACT

Peer tutoring with 12 students in an elementary multi-categorical resource room was initiated as a method of changing interaction from verbal aggression and hostility to overt helpfulness and support for one another. A mini-training session for the six older students instructed them in goals, methods, reinforcement, and modeling. Tutors received rewards of the reinforcement system equal to the student they were tutoring; and after tutoring there was a daily discussion with the tutors about their findings, difficulties, and strategies for a continuing process of remediation and strengthening interpersonal relationships. As the project progressed, the tutors gained in understanding of learning problems and in the process of teaching they firmed-up skills and concepts.
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CROSS-AGE, MULTICULTURAL PEER TUTORING

in an

ELEMENTARY RESOURCE ROOM

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Abstract

Peer tutoring in an elementary multi-categorical resource room was initiated as a method of changing interaction from verbal aggression and hostility to overt helpfulness and support for one another.

Six upper elementary students had been receiving group instruction from the resource teacher. A positive, systematic reinforcement system used earlier in the year had been gradually phased-out until the students were self-evaluating accomplishments by April. In May six lower elementary students were added to the program. There was intense rivalry which necessitated restructuring to build-in responsible roles and positive interaction. A mini-training session for the older students instructed them in goals, methods, reinforcement and modeling. Tutors received rewards of the reinforcement system equal to the student they were tutoring. After tutoring there was a daily discussion with the tutors about their findings, difficulties, strategies for a continuing process of remediation and strengthening interpersonal relationships. On the first day that the peer tutoring was implemented the older students were capable of modeling, praising and rewarding given the motivation of real responsibility plus immediate rewards. As the project progressed the tutors gained in understanding of learning problems and in the process of teaching they firmed-up skills and concepts too.

It is suggested that peer tutoring is a valuable aide for increasing learning in the classroom and for creating positive awareness and acceptance of differences.

Cross-Age, Multicultural Peer Tutoring in an Elementary Resource Room

Sometimes the richest experiences in life are the outcome of a painful beginning. The situation I am going to describe was a crisis for which my intervention strategy was peer-tutoring. It was not a research project, but a real classroom problem that occured when a volatile combination of youngsters was grouped.

The setting was the Laboratory School at the University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, Iowa, in the spring of 1976. I was the teacher for a resource program for mildly handicapped children. The Laboratory School had initiated the Special Education program that year in which the resource teacher instructed children within the regular classroom setting. This was not by design, but a temporary arrangement until some offices could be remodeled to make the room which is presently used. There were advantages in working with individuals and groups within the regular classroom; I was in close contact with the regular classroom teacher was aware of the materials and techniques I was using, and other students interacted freely with me. One disadvantage was that I wasn't always able to find a space where I could work with groups of students and use reinforcement systems. Scheduling and grouping became more complicated during the second semester as more youngsters were identified for placement.

There was one hour a day when a secondary foreign language room was not in use. Because the room was filled with desks and chairs, it was not an ideal setting, but that hour was an uninterrupted block of time for me to "do my own thing" with a group of upper elementary students.

There was never a dull day because they were a rambunctious group. I used a reinforcement system which consisted of cards earned for organizing, for attending behaviors, for amount of work accomplished, and for other behaviors that were beneficial to the group. We had class periods that were fun and productive. Rewards for the cards were arranged between the students and me. Some of them chose to eat a cookie or candy for each card completed (such completion usually took about four days). Some students saved cards until they had ten accumulated, and we went bowling after school or got a hamburger during lunch break. One child, Kevin, simply saved cards to prove that he could set a record for the most cards ever earned. By May, Kevin had over fifty cards and we negotiated for what he wanted most. He wanted to receive copies of a magazine throughout the summer. (THAT WAS A BEAUTIFUL OUTCOME FOR A BOY WHO HAD BEEN A NON-READER!) As the year progressed, the system had been altered to a less frequent use of cards and to intermittent praise. By April, the concrete reinforcement system was dropped, and each student filled out a self-evaluation at the end of each period to help us all keep goals in mind. I'm telling you this background about the reinforcement system because it was very

important later on to the success of the peer-tutoring project.

For now let me digress to my scheduling problem. I had five, new, lower elementary students to start in the program in May, so that they would be officially entered in the program and on their way the next fall. Practicum students from the University had completed their micro-lessons so the class was again totally mine. I decided to schedule both groups during the same hour and juggle groups with input for one group while the others had seatwork and then switch groups. It seemed logical, and it worked smoothly for about two days. There was some grumbling and protesting by the older students that they didn't like to have "little kids coming in to bother them". They insisted that this was no class for little kids. The younger children were definitely intimidated by the angry protests. We discussed the feelings and the older students reluctantly agreed that they would share the space and teacher attention since there wasn't another time, but their resentment wasn't really resolved.

At the end of a productive work period, the last ten minutes of classtime was free time when students had choices of activities which included playing educational games, building with legos, making art projects, etc. The most sought-after activity was building with legos. There was an argument over the use of the legos which resulted in more resentment than ever before.

Up to this time, I had been quite unaware of another factor. Most of the students rode a school bus together each day. Apparently

these older students were intimidating and hasseling the younger ones during the bus ride. This was not my domain, but I became informed of the threats and family feuds which had preceeded my well-intended plan.

One particular day emotions exploded. The younger students cowered about and cried and the older students paced around like caged tigers. I was able to stop physical violence from happening in my presence, but there was a barrage of threats that the conflict would be settled later.

I wanted to resolve the angry feelings rather than to separate the groups. I had to do something effective right away to prevent physical aggression. The elementary counselor listened to my description of the problem and agreed to have a class meeting with my volatile group. The children had all participated in class meetings as a problem-solving method before and had reviewed the ground rules for class meetings. The purpose for the meeting was defined as "Mrs. Jorgensen's discomfort" because the older students felt no need to resolve anything peaceably and the younger students would have chosen not to come to the resource room rather than to attempt to work it out. The discussion proceeded in a constructive direction and in a civilized tone until five minutes before the bell rang. Then, Ricky exploded again and the meeting dissolved into shouting and threats that what couldn't be settled here would be settled at a park near their homes! The yelling was barely subdued before the bell rang and thirty high

school students descended upon us and the circle of desks had to be rearranged into rows under the impatient eye of the foreign language instructor.

The younger students skittered down the hall to the safety of their classrooms and the older ones returned to their classrooms with an air of triumph. The counselor and I looked at each other and her one sentence summation was, "Boy, those are really gut-level feelings!" She would not be able to meet with us the next day, and anyway, it was obviously my responsibility to do something about the situation. That night I defined a plan that would assign new roles of responsibility to the older students. The plan was basically this: The younger students were to stay in the regular classroom the next day, for the first ~~thirty~~ twenty minutes, while I explained a tutoring plan to the older students.

In my work with emotionally disturbed children in the past, I had found that energy expressed as hostility and aggression can be diverted into constructive channels through the use of contingency contracting. The teacher and student discuss the academic or social goal to be completed and the desired outcome. When the student enters into the contract, the student becomes a willing participant; this participation can be the crucial turning point between failure and success. It was on this premise that I based a plan for changing the hostility of the older students into responsibility for the younger students. I would put the teaching tools and the rewards into the hands

of the older students. To assume that these youngsters who had been so boisterous and threatening would suddenly agree to be cooperative and enthusiastic and to be helpful was not realistic. Therefore, the award system was arranged so that the tutors would receive the same reward for each reward that their students received. On the first day, I would explain the purpose of the plan, and in a mini-training session, I would define the academic tasks, the method of presentation, the evaluation for student performance, and the reinforcement system. The next class session I explained the purpose of the tutoring plan. It was:

1. To help us all work together in an atmosphere of helpfulness.

2. To have older students become tutors since it was apparent they had skills that they could teach the younger students and it was also apparent that I could not do it without their help.

3. To have each tutor find out what the student knows and what the student will need to work on.

4. To help younger students feel good about coming to the resource room and to feel good about learning through experiencing success, praise, and rewards.

Ten diagnostic tasks in arithmetic were defined for the first day. I explained that today we would be trying to find out what the younger knew and what we could work on teaching them. As each task was

described, I modeled the teacher behaviors that the tutors were to use. Praise and wording were modeled in "kid" language and each tutor was given a chart to keep a record of tasks and performances. As I described the task and wrote it on the chalkboard, the tutors wrote the tasks on the individual record sheets. For example,

TASK I: Count orally.

Write "count orally" on your record. You will say: "Please count out loud for me as far as you can go." If your kid skips a number, help him. If he can go as far as twenty, say, "Okay, good counting." and mark twenty in the square. If your kid goes on and on past 100, you say, "Stop. You could go further, but I can tell that you count well." Mark 100+ on your record and mark the reward card two times.

TASK II: Count things.

You will put twenty blocks on the desk. You will say, "Please count these blocks one at a time for me." If the student gets it all right, you say, "That's the way to go!" Mark his reward card two times and mark the record, "O.K."

TASK III: Write Numbers.

You will give the student this sheet and a pencil. You will say, "Please write your numbers in the squares here. Start with one and go as far as you can. When the student is done, you say, "Good worker." and mark his card with two checks. <u>This is very important tutors</u>. Some of these kids make numbers backwards. Today your evaluation will not be

on how well they made the numbers--just on getting it done. If your student made a good five, you might want to say, "That's a good five." (Critical to the success of the interaction is the tutor's knowledge and acceptance of learning problems and the attitude that we are finding out what the student needs to work on.)

TASK IV: Numerals: Name Two-Place Numbers

I instructed the tutors to turn this paper over and think of a two-place number. Instructor: "Bruce, tell me a two-place number." Bruce: "Sixty-five." Instructor: "Good. Write sixty-five on the back of this paper. You will say, "What is this number?" If the student is right, you say, "That's right, let's try another one." Do about four two-place numbers and check the reward card each time you praise.

I continued with instructions for the following tasks:

TASK V: Write Two-Place Number After You Say It

TASK VI: Name Three-Place Numbers

TASK VII: Write Three-Place Numbers

TASK VIII: Count By Tens

TASK IX: Count By Fives

TASK X: Timed Worksheet (Stopwatch)

I explained, "Since we cannot all use the stopwatch at one time, I will have Bruce do task ten first and then give the stopwatch to someone else. You will let your student use any method of problem solving he wants.

Watch closely. Does your student use fingers? Does he count objects in his head? Does he make marks on his paper?"

The training time for the first day had taken twenty minutes. There were several important components in the plan:

1. I was certain that the younger students would have a high rate of success on the tasks I had selected.

2. I had alerted the tutors to the importance of observing carefully and uncritically, keeping a record of skills they would need to teach.

3. I had provided a model for positive interaction. You recall that the tutors were well oriented to the reinforcement cards, and it was not difficult for them to imitate teacher behaviors of praising and rewarding.

When the younger students came in, I told them very briefly that they would be working with a partner whom I had chosen for each of them. I told them that their tutor would ask them to count and write numbers and that they would get an M&M for each mark that their partner put on their card today. Then the partners would look on the activity chart to see what to do next. The younger children appeared to be agreeable, if a bit apprehensive, about the plan; and each tutor eagerly and with some authority, began the first lesson. I circulated from pair to pair to prompt the tutors at times, to praise the tutors, and in general, to share my gladness that they were tutoring well. My praise for the younger

students was directed to the tutors as I commented, "Aren't you proud of the way Gary is working!" or "Wayne, you have a hard worker there!" The favorite task for the tutors was using the stopwatch for the timed fact sheet.

The tutoring session lasted about fifteen minutes. As each pair completed the tasks, they counted the marks on the reward cards, which were then traded for an equal number of M&M's for each tutor as well as for each student. They then began an activity that was assigned to them that day. Instead of free-time which had been our most unstructured time and the most difficult time, they were signed up to play a game or to play with legos on a schedule that would rotate each day. Again, the older students taught the younger ones how to play familiar games while they all continually popped M&M's into their mouths. I felt that the first day was a total success, and I was delighted with the tutors for adopting their positive roles so quickly and effectively. I think the second and third graders were a little baffled by the experience and they were still a bit shy about interaction.

The younger students returned to their classrooms for the last ten minutes of the period. The tutors put the chairs back into rows and we discussed the outcome of their experiences. Bruce very objectively reported: "Gary made three, eight and nine wrong, and twelve, thirteen, all the way up to twenty, he turned the numbers around." Ricky said, "Tyrone took six minutes to do two rows of addition facts. He needs a faster way to solve problems!"

Each tutor had spotted a skill which his student needed to work on, and we discussed ways that they might teach the skill. The tutors expressed amazement that second and third graders were not able to do all of the tasks, which gave me the opportunity to assure them that each of their students needed very careful help so that they would not become discouraged. I told them that a good teacher never lets a student fail, so that if any task was too hard for the student we would have to find a better way to teach it.

In the next several lessons, additional tasks that were pre-tested and eventually taught were a number plus 0, a number plus 1, a number minus 0, a number minus 1, addition using the number line, subtraction using the number line, and recall of nine basic facts with like addends, one more, and one less. We came up with new ways to teach basic facts; for example, for memorization of facts with sums of ten there were activities created. Ricky saw me in the hall one day and explained a new game that he was sure was going to work. We found a spot where he could tell me about it, and with almost no changes, I agreed it was a good activity. (His enthusiasm was equal to his earlier expressions of anger!)

By now the spread of individual differences was becoming apparent, and the tutors were all becoming resourceful in using methods and making games which they felt would help their students. It was heart-warming to see Ricky put his arm around Tyrone as they finished tasks and began their break-time activity. I overheard tutors commenting to each other about their kids: "Boy, Gary is getting better." I realized, along with

my feeling of relief, that something wonderful had happened when the kids began to arrange to sit with their partners on the bus. I was so proud of the way the tutors had responded that I had two of the sessions video-taped. This provided the tutors with a chance to evaluate what they were doing. They were a little embarrassed at seeing themselves, so there was some nervous laughing, but they were as seriously impressed and proud as I was.

I finished school that spring on a high! I invited each of the classroom teachers, the prinicpal, and the counselor to watch the video-tapes. I asked the youngsters for their permission to use the video-tapes to show others how older students can be used to tutor younger students.

In retrospect, I regretted that I hadn't had a video-tape of the class before the peer-tutoring was initiated. But at the height of the conflict, I was too uncomfortable and desperate to change the situation as quickly as possible and I didn't think about gathering baseline data. I had restructured the groups and plunged into the plan with no thought of how significant pre and post data would be.

As I reflect on the characteristics of the two groups, I believe that they were ideally suited for each other. Since then, I have never had two similar groups of youngsters who could benefit from peer tutoring to the extent that those youngsters did. They were matched with educational deficits on one hand and higher skill levels on the other. They were the appropriate ages and they had the potential to benefit

affectively from the structured approach and positive reinforcement provided. I want to emphasize that we should allow the learning disabled students to be tutors. I have found that as a student is preparing to tutor there is "real" motivation for him to demonstrate and verbalize a process until it is well done which provides for practice that might otherwise seem like dull repetition.

In closing, let me suggest that peer tutoring is one of the resource teacher's and the regular classroom teacher's most valuable aides for mainstreaming because it spreads your effectiveness as well as creating a positive awareness and acceptance of differences.